

*To the Rev. Dr. Wadsworth
with regard to Dr. Hamilton*

OBITUARY NOTICE

OF

DOCTOR LEWIS P. GEBHARD,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILADELPHIA COUNTY MEDICAL
SOCIETY, MEMBER OF THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS,
ETC. ETC.

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BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR
OF
LEWIS P. GEBHARD, M.D.

Mr. President, and fellow members :—

By the request of the President, it has been made my duty to prepare and read before the Society, an obituary notice of our late venerated member and Ex-President, Dr. L. P. Gebhard. For the honor of this appointment, for as such it is regarded, it is proper to express my thanks, whilst a regret arises that some other member, more intimately acquainted with events occurring in the life of the deceased, had not been designated for the purpose.

The position held by Dr. Gebhard during some years previous to his death, was peculiar in the fact that he had lived long enough to become the oldest practitioner of Philadelphia. It might, therefore, be said, that in the ranks of the profession generally, he was often regarded as holding, in some sort, an almost patriarchal pre-eminence; whilst in moral character and in devotion to a strict performance of duty, professional or of a more general nature, he stood forth through his long life prominent as a model.

Lewis P. Gebhard, M.D., was born on the 14th of June, 1791, in Columbia County, New York. His father, the Rev. John Gabriel Gebhard, was pastor of the old German Reformed Church in Nassau Street, New York, and in this relation he continued to discharge his pastoral duties until the city was occupied by the British troops during the Revolution. Lewis was the youngest of seven sons, all of whom he survived. The late General Jacob Gebhard, the Hon. John Gebhard, and Dr. Joseph Gebhard, of Hudson, were brothers of Dr. Lewis P. Gebhard.

Selecting the profession of medicine as the business of his life, he entered in the year 1809 the office of Dr. John Bay, of Claverack, and under his direction prosecuted his studies until October, 1811, when he left for the purpose of attending lectures in the University of Pennsylvania, whither students from all parts of the Union and from elsewhere resorted annually, attracted by the fame of its professors. The lectures were at that time delivered by Drs. Rush,

Barton, Physick, Coxe, Wistar, and James, a constellation whose effulgence paled every other medical institution of the country.

On arriving in Philadelphia, young Gebhard at once placed himself under the guidance of Dr. Benjamin Rush, and thus remained until he completed his studies and obtained his diploma in 1813. Returning soon after to his native State, the young doctor located himself in Troy, when, after remaining scarcely two years, he judged (and rightly too) that Philadelphia presented a field more promising, as a permanent location for one who already felt that all his energies were engrossed in the desire and resolution to make the profession of his choice a successful one, profitable alike to others and to himself.

On arriving once more in Philadelphia, never again, as the event demonstrated, to leave it, he opened an office in Race Street between Third and Fourth Streets. This was in 1815, and in the same year he was united in marriage with Miss Mary Ann Halberstadt. He remained in this location about ten years. His practice having now become large and remunerative, he built an excellent and commodious house on Race Street opposite Franklin Square. He removed to it and there resided until the day of his death, a more lengthened occupation, probably, of the same premises than had ever before occurred to a member of our profession in this city. It will be seen from the dates just given, that the practice of Dr. Gebhard extended through a period of sixty years, of which fifty-eight were spent in Philadelphia. Neither was there any important intermission in this practice; and retaining, as he did in an eminent degree, his mental and physical powers, he continued to attend his patients nearly to the day of his death, having visited, in consultation, a patient residing about 25 miles in the interior of New Jersey only one week previous to his decease. As illustrative of the extent of his practice and the inordinate physical and mental exertion he was forced to undergo, for he was earnest and conscientious in the discharge of professional duty, it may be stated, as appears in his retiring address given in 1864 at the conclusion of his term of service as President of this Society, that in the year 1822, commencing with July, he attended three hundred cases of bilious remittent fever, uncomplicated, or complicated with fever of the intermittent type. The suffering caused by both these forms of disease at that time is well known to the few older members of the profession who yet survive; yet strange to say, of the entire number only three deaths occurred. In reference to this outbreak of fever Dr. Gebhard says in his address: "While the disease was at its height, as many as seventy-five patients were visited every day on foot for three days in succession, many of whom being very ill were visited two or three times a day." The well-known integrity and modesty of Dr. Gebhard preclude every thought of inaccuracy in this statement. In this connection it may be proper to say that the writer, when located at Ninth and Buttonwood Streets in 1832, was informed by the late Dr. Janney, "That some years previous his own health had been nearly ruined by the exposure at all hours of day and night, bodily fatigue, and mental exercise he had undergone in attending to a vast amount of bilious remittent and intermittent fever, chiefly in the Northern Liberties

and Spring Garden." This will cause you no surprise when told that on one occasion in the course of twenty-four hours, he had visited in this epidemic one hundred and twenty-six patients, nearly all prostrate with one or other of these maladies. These attacks were at that time so prevalent and concentrated as to location, that the doctor would often visit four or five families in the same square, and find perhaps in each house from two to four cases.

From this, perhaps pertinent digression, we return to the subject of our notice, by stating that a large part of the earlier practice of Dr. Gebhard evidently lay in the district of Spring Garden. It is not to be imagined, however, that the Spring Garden of half a century ago bore much resemblance to that of the present day; for, with the exception of some of the older portions, it now constitutes, in consequence of its fine elevation and the excellence of the improvements, one of the most attractive sections of the city. Nearly the entire population of the district, at the remote period in view, was included between Vine and Green Streets on the south and north; and between Sixth and Tenth Streets on the east and west. The inhabitants of German origin were greatly in the majority, and characteristically industrious and thrifty; and if, as must be admitted, the district is now prominent in the eyes of the public, it was not a whit less so, though in a different way, at the time spoken of. In this region were located by far the greater number of the victuallers of Philadelphia, whether of high or low degree; and conspicuous among those of the former class, the names of White, Shuster, Boraef, Drum, and Lowry, doubtless, still recur to the recollection of such of the epicures of the olden time as may yet survive. The houses of the wealthier class were often partially surrounded by gardens of decided taste and beauty, such as often embellish German settlements. The lilac, the jasmine, the woodbine, and the rose often perfumed the air of the early morning and evening hours with such fragrance as was well calculated to inspire the thought of a stroll through this, in some respects, not inviting locality; whilst the urchin and the lassie were often tempted to pluck a protruding flower, sprig, or rosebud that they might, perchance, present it to mother as the firstling of the season of flowers. The title of Spring Garden is thus seen to have been, at this time, a most appropriate one; for, although the premises of the less wealthy did not afford space for much display, they often contributed an humble share in making this district, if possible, the genuine *rus in urbe*, despite the stronger claims of the Germans of East Kensington to the honor. But the prominence alluded to, more especially, was of an entirely opposite character to that just represented, yet far more calculated to enlist our sympathies in reminding us of the unflinching fidelity to incumbent duty exhibited by our departed member in the midst of trials and labors of no ordinary kind. It is beyond all question that an over proportion of the more rugged, violent, and boisterous of the population of our city were residents of Spring Garden; and it is simply truthful to say that many young men of wealthy and reputable families were of this character. Here, in fact, were large numbers of those who prided themselves on their muscle, who were over

ready and eager for a fray, in single combat it might be, or preferably in a general mêlée, such as each recurring Fourth of July was almost sure to inaugurate in the olden time, either at Centre Square, or later, on Bush Hill, until at length these celebrations, riotous and disgraceful as they had become, were banished by the authorities. Here, also, were numbers of petty gamblers with their dice, roulette, or thimble-rig, who rejoiced in the opportunity that a military parade, or foot-race upon the outskirts of the city, or a Fourth of July celebration, afforded them to ply their vocation with unusual vigor, and, as was often charged, with such glaring unfairness as to provoke many of the bloody frays that ensued. From this quarter, too, were often procured many of the rugged and reckless men, who, for a stipulated sum of money, would hasten, before daylight, to a central part of the city designated, and there wait, if necessary, by the hour, or otherwise, push or fight their way to the office window whence bank stock, promising large dividends, could, as a rule, be obtained only through such agents. A feature of this region, and one too that would surely have tried the nerves of many who might be compelled to go there, during the night, in the discharge of professional duty, is exemplified in the fact that very many large and ferocious dogs were kept by the victuallers and others for the protection of their property; for, after bedtime, darkness and solitude here reigned supreme beyond every other quarter of the city. That many of these brutes were also kept by the profligate for fighting is certain. From whatever cause, whether to threaten intruders, the staggering, brawling inebriate, or the vicious, returning from the haunts of dissipation or crime, matters not; these animals, at uncertain intervals, would become excited, and, at times, the noise made by them could, in the stillness of the night, be heard far away in the central portions of the city. The streets, too, at this early period, were often in a wretched condition, in some parts unpaved; and the foot-ways were sometimes in a similar state, whilst the feeble glimmering of a few lamps, placed far from each other, struggled in vain against the prevailing darkness, for at this time illumination by gas had not been introduced. Such was the locality to which, during the earlier years of his practice, Dr. Gebhard was so often summoned. Let us now for a moment contemplate the physique of him who did not shrink from duty under the most adverse circumstances. At the early age of ten years, under the paternal roof, he was attacked with dyspepsia so violent and protracted in its character as imminently to imperil his existence; and although he recovered from the disease, it seemed, however, to have left some permanent change in the condition of his digestive organs. Throughout the remainder of his life occasional slight, transitory symptoms of the malady were felt, and on one occasion he was forced to confine himself to biscuit and tea during the greater part of a year; attending, however, to his practice as usual. In stature, Dr. Gebhard was below the medium height, slight in form, rather delicate in appearance, and seemingly not fitted to endure the exposure and physical exertion attendant upon a large practice. Several members of his father's family had moreover fallen victims to phthisis, and the peculiar conformation of

his chest rather denoted a proclivity to this disease. Yet, in spite of these apparently unfavorable indications, his health was, with occasional exceptions, decidedly good, and from the moment of his return to Philadelphia he entered upon his vocation with willing mind and resolute heart; more so, probably, than if he had foreseen the hardships he was about to encounter in the prosecution of a large part of his practice in a district so inauspicious, in some of its features, as that alluded to. Fortunately, however, Dr. Gebhard possessed, in a most enthusiastic and hopeful temperament, a jewel that does not fall to the lot of every medical practitioner. His native cheerfulness seemed never to forsake him, not even, as many of you know, in the latter months of his existence, and thus constituted it occasions no surprise that his eye turned instinctively from the dark and unpropitious, to rest upon that which was bright and promising. He was, moreover, endued with good moral sense, and therefore was conscientiously alive to the obligation of, and faithful in performing every incumbent duty. There are, probably, few persons who at the present time can fully realize the scenes through which our late venerated fellow-member must so often have passed in his practice of sixty years. When the darkness was round and about, when the pelting of the pitiless storm was upon him, when men of violence, of sinister mien and purpose, could, from their covert shelter, so easily and securely assault (for here the watchman was then almost unknown, his place being supplied by watch-dogs, threatening on either side as if the midnight burglar or incendiary drew near), how oft, time and again, did this slightly formed, delicate looking man pursue his way in this or the other solitary street, or path, until he at length reached the couch of the sufferer, prostrated, it might be, in the household of abundance and ease, or in the abode of poverty and wretchedness. It may, probably, be admitted that no other practitioner of our city has ever had greater obstacles to contend with, or more fully triumphed over them, than Dr. Gebhard.

During his protracted medical career it had been his lot to witness the invasion of several epidemics, two of them of alarming character, and standing prominently forth in the history of Philadelphia. In the year 1820 the yellow fever broke out in the central portion of the city, near the Delaware. The writer, a boy at the time, and residing near the infected district, well remembers the dismay that seized upon the inhabitants, and how greatly the alarm and apprehension were augmented when, by order of the Board of Health, several streets were directed to be closed up, with a view to arrest, if possible, the extension of the disease, and prevent a recurrence of the appalling scenes that attended the same malady in 1793 and 1798.

In December, 1825, influenza made its appearance, and carried off far more of the inhabitants than it was ever known to do before or since. In July, 1832, Asiatic cholera visited the city, and caused perhaps greater alarm than that occasioned by the yellow fever of 1820. Reference to these epidemics may be found in the retiring address of Dr. Gebhard. It does not appear, however, that he had any special duties to perform in a public capacity during these

visitations; for even at an early period he had obtained a large and laborious private practice, which, with the greatly increased business that is sure to be thrown upon the physician in seasons of alarm, must have kept him fully employed. Again, the older practitioners would, doubtless, have placed in their hands the chief direction in such a crisis, whilst the younger and less occupied would be called upon as aids and assistants.

Dr. Gebhard maintained throughout his career an excellent reputation as a prudent and successful practitioner in public and professional estimation. Whilst in some points, regarding the causes of certain diseases and their treatment, he might be deemed theoretical, accepting, as he doubtless did in these exceptional cases, the views of his preceptor Rush, he was, nevertheless, not a theorist either by nature or in practice; nor did he manifest any decided bias in this direction. He was endowed with perceptive faculties of a high order, in the use of which he was diligent and patient, though of course denied, whilst a student and long after, the advantages afforded at a later period by various instruments and appliances for the more accurate detection of abnormal physiology, and the changes in tissue resulting. So far as we can learn, his chief attention was given to determine the precise value of the symptoms singly and in correlation, aiming thereby to deduce a few indications of positive, unmistakable value as a basis for treatment, disregarding such other symptoms, however numerous, as could not at the moment be made to harmonize with these indications. His practice was, as a rule, rather conservative, yet subject to many exceptions, as the writer has seen exemplified in consultation with him. In this connection, Dr. J. M. Adler says in a note: "As a practitioner, Dr. Gebhard was self-reliant, exceedingly deliberate, very careful in his diagnosis, and entirely orthodox in his treatment. Many of his ideas were very original, and I may say I have followed some of his theoretical notions with great profit and success. I may mention, as specimens, his treatment of scarlatina with digitalis. He used it with great success, to the exclusion of almost all other remedies. In inflammatory croup his practice was bold, and novel, and successful, relying upon free depletion, general and local bleeding. He informed me that he had not failed for a long time in arresting the progress of the disease by this means. He was the strictest man in his dietetic discipline I ever knew; and if I had any fault to find with his practice, it was in this particular. In his own person he illustrated (as he was frequently wont to state by way of illustration) 'the advantage of careful diet.' In his intercourse with physicians, he adopted the 'Golden Rule' as his guide, and thus he was seldom betrayed into an exhibition of weakness, displayed at times where it would least be anticipated, by treating those who might be his subordinates with arrogance or negligence. In this relation Dr. Adler again declares: 'He was noted for his highly honorable character as a physician; a scrupulous observer of the ethics of the profession; punctilious and conservative in the treatment of those of his medical friends with whom he came in contact.'"

In the year 1828 Dr. Gebhard was elected a fellow of the College of

Physicians of Philadelphia, the most ancient, renowned, and widely-known organization of the kind in this country; and at the date of his decease he was, with the exception of Drs. George B. Wood and Benjamin H. Coates, the oldest surviving fellow of that body.

In the year 1853 he became a member of the Philadelphia County Medical Society. His attendance at the meetings was frequent until within the few past years. He held various offices in the Society, and was repeatedly chosen as a delegate to the American Medical Association, and Medical Society of the State of Pennsylvania. In 1864 he was elected President of the Society, presiding at its meetings, as many of you know, with characteristic modesty and urbanity. The retiring address given by Dr. Gebhard at the end of his term of service as President, in connection with the extensive, important, and interesting addenda, in the shape of reminiscences, is greatly worthy of commendation. Few physicians of this city could, from personal knowledge, have embodied such an amount of fact and incident, medical and general, as can be found upon the pages of the addenda; for it is to be remembered that Dr. Gebhard lived and practised here long enough to see the population of Philadelphia advance from 100,000 in 1815 to 700,000 in 1873. Dr. Gebhard was also elected some years since a member of the Northern Medical Association, before which body he read several useful, practical papers.

But it is time briefly to glance at the character and life of our deceased member in another and less professional aspect. Endowed with strong moral perception, and gentle, sympathizing heart, he could not contemplate with indifference the moral degradation or suffering of his fellow-mortal, though he were himself the author of it. That one of the most prolific sources of poverty, misery, and crime, is the fruit of unlimited indulgence in intoxicating beverages was as evident, half a century ago, as at the present moment. Fully convinced of this fact, Dr. Gebhard threw himself resolutely, as a pioneer, into the arena where a very few others had manfully unfurled, in the face of every discouragement, the banner of temperance. Excitement and hostility to the contemplated reform were manifested everywhere, yet this did not intimidate the gentle, but undaunted Gebhard from opening his parlor, in July, 1837, to the first formal temperance meeting held in Philadelphia, leading, as it did, to the formation of the State Temperance Society, the earliest organized in Pennsylvania. The Philadelphia County Temperance Society was subsequently formed, mainly through the instrumentality of Drs. Gebhard, Bell, Condie, and Jewell, aided, as they were, by Matthew Carey, Matthew Newbirk, and Mr. Bradford, a distinguished advocate of this city. Neither by precept nor example did our faithful yet judicious friend of reform ever prove recreant to the banner he had pledged himself to support. Actuated by similar benevolent impulse, he early became a member of the Colonization Society, formed, as is well known, with the view of ameliorating the condition of the colored race in the United States; and, with like tender, compassionate regard for the sufferings of the brute creation, he joined, soon after its establishment, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

In his intercourse with patients Dr. Gebhard treated their foibles with indulgence, yet always insisted upon his directions being rigidly obeyed; if negligence or omissions in this respect were noticed, his kindness of heart suggested gentle expostulation, rather than sharp rebuke, as the proper corrective. The hopefulness of his own nature imparted hope to the desponding patient. In the various business relations of life, with their attendant irritation, he manifested the same forbearing spirit. If, perchance, casually, his elastic temperament suffered a depression, as when under the influence of his old complaint, he would endeavor when in the bosom of his own family to manifest as little of this as possible; for, devoted as he was to the comfort and pleasures of those most dear to him, he would not, willingly, do or say aught to mar their happiness.

The religious sentiments impressed upon Dr. Gebhard early in life were not fruitless. He became, soon after returning to Philadelphia, a member of the Third Dutch Reformed Church, and remained in its communion until his death; the congregation having a short time before his decease united with the Presbyterians, under the title of Emanuel Presbyterian Church. Occupied in the duties of an extensive practice, he yet endeavored so to arrange his visits for the Sabbath as to enable him to attend, if possible, the services of that day—consecrated as it is to prayer and devotion—at least once or perhaps twice. In these devout exercises of the sanctuary he found comfort and support; and in the performance of his duties as a church-member he exhibited the same zealous, active, and cheerful spirit, that characterized him elsewhere in the discharge of other duties. That the benign disposition of Dr. Gebhard was in great measure inherited, cannot be doubted; that the religious element had much to do in fostering and strengthening this estimable frame of mind is also certain. His faith in God, as the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and in His love and mercy to fallen man was unreserved, immovable, and gave to him “the peace which passeth all understanding;” thus rendering the long, weary, and oftentimes dark path he trod, resplendent with the “Sun of righteousness.” In and by this faith he continued to walk in the path he should go, and in this faith he found daily strength and support, and in the end consolation and peace.

The illness terminating the life of our aged and greatly esteemed member was of short duration, and not accompanied with much suffering. On Thursday, the 24th December last, he complained slightly; on Friday he experienced rather severe pain in the abdomen, but soon obtained relief from a small portion of morphia. On Saturday he was quite easy, and, though weak, apparently improved, and thus continued until 9 o'clock on Sunday morning, the 30th December; when suddenly, whilst seated in his chair, he appeared to be sinking, and, in an hour after, visibly without suffering, gently sunk to his rest. The funeral services took place in the church to which he was attached, and an impressive discourse was delivered by the eloquent pastor, Dr. Wadsworth.

GEORGE HAMILTON.